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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

JUNE 27, 2002

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to be able to give you a brief update on highway safety since the enactment of TEA 21 and to describe the issues facing the program today.

Congress has given the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) its prime goal: to save lives and prevent injuries on the nation's highways. NHTSA has pursued this goal for more than 30 years, and has accomplished a great deal. Our preliminary analysis of highway traffic fatalities in 2001 shows that the rate of fatal injury is at an all-time low of 1.5 deaths per hundred million vehicle miles traveled, compared with 5.5 in 1966 when Congress enacted the highway safety law.

The total number of people killed in highway crashes in 2001 is estimated to be 41,730, compared to 41,821 in 2000. The number of police-reported injuries dropped from 3.2 million in 2000 to 3.0 million in 2001. Vehicle miles traveled increased slightly to 2.778 trillion in 2001, up from 2.75 trillion in 2000.

While the human toll of pain and suffering from these crashes can never be calculated, just over a month ago, on May 9th, NHTSA published a new study, based on calendar year 2000 data, "The Economic Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes." This study shows that the economic impact of these crashes on America's roadways has reached \$230.6 billion a year--an average annual cost of \$820 for every person living in the United States.

Nearly 75 percent of the costs are paid by those not directly involved - primarily through insurance premiums, taxes and travel delay. In 2000 the costs born by society rather than individual crash victims totaled \$170 billion. About 9 percent of these costs are paid from public revenues. All together, the cost of motor vehicle crashes throughout the nation equals 2.3 percent of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product.

This new study clarifies the factors that account for the enormous toll America experiences each year due to death and injury on our roadways. In a most compelling

way, it reminds all of us-individuals as well as government-how vital it is that we commit significant resources to highway safety.

In TEA 21, Congress recognized that further advances in highway safety would require more resources. The Act gave us a number of programs, some new and some renewed, to help prevent crashes and to mitigate their effects when they occur.

Since enactment of TEA 21, NHTSA has awarded a total of \$729.2 million in Section 402 State and community formula highway safety grants to encourage proper use of occupant protection devices, reduce alcohol and drug-impaired driving, reduce crashes between motorcycles and other vehicles, reduce school bus crashes, improve police traffic services, improve emergency medical services and trauma care systems, increase pedestrian and bicyclist safety, improve traffic record systems, and improve roadway safety.

Our Section 403 Highway Safety Research and Development program is the scientific underpinning for NHTSA's national leadership in highway safety programs, which includes behavioral research to reduce traffic deaths and injuries. Between FY 1998 and FY 2003, TEA 21 authorized a total of \$432 million for our efforts under Section 403.

TEA 21 also established several new safety incentive grant programs. Seat belts and child restraints are the most effective tools we have to mitigate the effects of crashes. We know from long experience that seat belts reduce the chance of fatal injury by half, and that properly secured child safety seats reduce fatal injury for infants (less than 1 year old) by 71 percent and for toddlers (1-4 years old) by 54 percent in passenger cars. For infants and toddlers in light trucks, the corresponding reductions are 58 percent and 59 percent, respectively. TEA 21 provided a set of incentive programs to increase the use of these life-saving devices.

Between FY 1999 and FY 2002, NHTSA awarded approximately \$321.6 million in Section 157 Seat Belt Incentive and Innovative grants. Between FY 1999 and FY 2001, NHTSA also awarded \$31.3 million to States for Section 405 Occupant Protection Incentive grants, which fund projects to increase seat belt and child safety seat use through increased enforcement of safety belt and child safety seat laws, air bag education, and correct child safety seat usage education. In addition, between FY 2000 and FY 2002 NHTSA awarded \$22.5 million to States for carrying out child passenger protection and education projects provided by Section 2003(b) of TEA 21.

As of June 2001, the date of our most recent survey, the nation's average seat belt use rate was at 73 percent, up from 65 percent in June 1998. The use of seat belts throughout the United States saves an estimated 12,000 lives each year and the use of child restraints saves more than 300 children under age 5.

Our new economic impact study highlights the vital importance of seat belt use. In addition to the lives they save, seat belts also prevent an estimated 325,000 serious injuries each year and save \$50 billion in medical care, lost productivity and other injury-

related costs. Conversely, the failure of crash victims to wear seat belts leads to an estimated 9,200 unnecessary fatalities each year and 143,000 avoidable injuries, costing society \$26 billion. It is a great tragedy that 27 percent of our adult population fails to buckle their seat belts.

Child restraint use among young children has reached much higher levels than seat belt use among adults. The national average use rate of child restraints for infants is 95 percent, and for children 1 to 4 it is 91 percent. While these use rates are very good, of the 529 children under 5 years of age who died in passenger motor vehicles in 2000, an estimated 251 (47 percent) were totally unrestrained.

In the current fiscal year, we are using the flexibility provided by the innovative seat belt incentive program in Section 157 to focus on programs that combine intense seat belt enforcement with strong media campaigns. Last year, we worked with eight Southeastern States in an intensive "Click It or Ticket" seat belt use effort that achieved an average 9-percentage-point increase in seat belt use across the region. Preliminary data show a decline in motor vehicle fatalities in that region. This year we expanded the effort with 30 States and the District of Columbia using the "Click It or Ticket" message. Our data so far shows that this approach is effective in raising seat belt use levels across America.

Alcohol-impaired driving continues to be the most difficult problem we face in our effort to prevent fatal crashes. We have reduced the incidence of alcohol involvement in fatal crashes from above 50 percent to about 40 percent, but 40 percent is still far too high. The programs under TEA 21 have helped reduce alcohol-related crashes by encouraging tougher laws, strengthening law enforcement, and enhancing public education. We believe that future programs building on the knowledge we have gained will bring further reductions.

Our new economic impact study underscores the huge economic cost associated with alcohol-related crashes. In 2000, these crashes resulted in 16,792 fatalities, 513,000 nonfatal injuries, and \$50.9 billion in economic losses. Alcohol-related crashes account for 22 percent of all crash costs.

TEA 21 provided a set of programs to address the nation's alcohol-impaired driving problem, including incentive grants to encourage States to adopt and enforce laws which provide that any person with a blood-alcohol concentration .08 percent or greater while operating a motor vehicle in the State shall be deemed to have committed a per se offense of driving while intoxicated.

Between FY 1998 and FY 2001, NHTSA awarded approximately \$253 million in Section 163 incentive grants to States that adopted and enforced .08 laws. In FY 1998, the first year of these incentive grants, 15 States had .08 laws in effect. By FY 2001, 27 States, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico had complying .08 laws in effect, a significant increase since the initiation of the program. Three additional States-Mississippi, South Dakota, and Wyoming-will be eligible for .08 grants this year.

Between FY 1998 and FY 2001, NHTSA awarded States approximately \$132 million in Section 410 Alcohol-Impaired Driving Countermeasures Incentive grants. Section 410 grants fund projects to reduce drunk driving through implementation of new laws, innovative programs and increased enforcement.

TEA 21's alcohol-related transfer penalty programs are also having their intended effect. The number of States with laws that prohibit open alcoholic beverage containers in the passenger area of a motor vehicle has increased from 14 to 35 (including the District of Columbia) in response to Section 154. The number of States that have comprehensive programs to control repeat intoxicated drivers has increased from 4 to 29 (including the District of Columbia) as a result of Section 164's requirements.

TEA 21 also provided an incentive program for highway safety data improvements. Between FY 1999 and FY 2002, NHTSA awarded a total of \$32 million in Section 411 incentive grants to encourage States to take effective actions to improve the timeliness, accuracy, completeness, uniformity, and accessibility of their highway safety data. In FY 2002, TEA 21's final year of authorizations for this program, Section 411 grants totaling \$9.5 million were made to 44 States, Puerto Rico, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and 4 territories.

Finally, TEA-21 authorized \$2 million for each of FYs 1998 through 2003 to continue the National Driver Register (NDR), a NHTSA program that facilitates the interstate transfer of driver licensing information concerning problem drivers whose licenses to drive have been suspended or revoked for cause. The Act also made several changes to the NDR law, including allowing Federal departments or agencies (like the State Department) that both issue motor vehicle operator's licenses and transmit reports on individuals to the NDR to participate in the NDR. Due in part to this expanded use, the number of inquiries the NDR processes each year has increased significantly.

In closing, I would like to stress that NHTSA continues to work intensively with the States to implement each of these vital programs. Together, they have made America safer for its citizens. We are developing our legislative program for fiscal years 2004 and beyond. We can assure you that we will build on the foundation laid by TEA 21 as we look toward the reauthorization of NHTSA's safety programs.

This concludes my statement. I would be glad to answer any questions.